

L'Chaim

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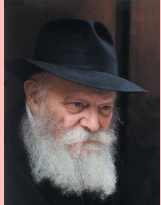
September 6, 2024

The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תר"ץ ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"To You I lifted up my eyes, You Who dwell in heaven" (Psalm 123:1)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

The end of this week's Torah portion, Shoftim, deals with the *egla arufa*, the beheaded calf which atoned for a murder whose perpetrator was unknown. If a body was found out in the open and it was not known who had killed the person, the Torah commands the elders of the nearest city to take a year-old calf down to the river and proclaim, "Our hands did not spill this blood, and our eyes did not see." This served to both atone for the death and also publicized the matter, so that the true murderer could be found.

It seems odd at first that any culpability is ascribed to the elders of the city which just happened to be closest to the discovery. They may not have even known of this person's existence during his lifetime. What possible role could the city's leaders have played in his death? Why does the Torah involve the city's rabbinical court, when obviously the real murderer is the one who needs to be punished?

The mitzva of the *egla arufa* serves to underscore the dictum: "All Jews are guarantors for each other." The responsibility for the death lies not only upon the shoulders of the cold-blooded murderer, but also upon the inhabitants of the nearest town and most specifically, on the community leaders, the elders who served on the supreme court.

The innocence of these leaders must be publicly proclaimed, for it was their responsibility to ensure the high moral caliber of their flock. Had they instilled Jewish values properly, such a situation would have never arisen. The fact that this murder happened in their domain shows that something is indeed wrong with their leadership.

The concept of bloodshed may also be applied to the Jew's spiritual life. When a person transgresses Torah law he is ostensibly "murdering" his G-dly Jewish soul with the degradation it must endure. With the repetition of such actions a Jew in this spiritually reduced state can even appear to be a lifeless corpse, where he too is found in an "open field," the domain of the non-Jewish world.

Whose responsibility is this Jew's present condition? Is he not responsible for his own actions which led to his spiritual downfall? Could he not, of his own free will, have abandoned the "open field" and returned to the "city," the embracing fold of the Jewish way of life?

The Torah clearly states the duties of the Jewish leaders: "The members of the greater court were to gird themselves with ropes of iron...and make the rounds in all the inhabited places of Israel...and teach all of Israel." Their function was to ensure that this individual would not fall through the cracks and abandon the proper path of the Torah.

Being responsible for our fellow Jew is a lesson which should be noted by every Jew, especially during the month of Elul, when the thoughts of the entire Jewish People turn to repentance and return to G-d before the advent of the new year. During this propitious month for repentance, when G-d goes out into the "field" to make our return to Him that much easier, let us truly exemplify the love of our fellow Jew so we can all enter the G-dly palace on the Day of Judgement.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Here Comes the Judge

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Don't be judgmental. Unless, of course, you happen to be a judge. Then it's your job.

This week's Parshah, Shoftim (Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9), begins with the biblical command for judges to be appointed in every city and town to adjudicate and maintain a just, ordered, civil society. Interestingly, it occurs in the first week of Elul, the month in which we are to prepare in earnest for the Days of Judgment ahead, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are, however, some significant differences between earthly judges and the Heavenly Judge. In the earthly court, if after a fair trial a defendant is found guilty, then there's really not much room for clemency on the part of the judge. The law is the law and must take its course. The accused may shed rivers of tears, but no human judge can be certain if his remorse is genuine. The Supreme Judge, however, does know whether the accused genuinely regrets his actions or is merely putting on an act. Therefore, He alone is able to forgive. That is why in heavenly judgments, *teshuvah* (repentance) is effective.

The Maharal of Prague gave another reason. Only G-d is able to judge the whole person. Every one of us has good and bad to some extent. Even those

who have sinned may have many other good deeds that outweigh the bad ones. Perhaps even one good deed was of such major significance that it alone could serve as a weighty counterbalance. The point is, only G-d knows. Only He can judge the individual in the context of his whole life and all his deeds, good and bad.

Our goal is to emulate the heavenly court. We should try to look at the totality of the person. You think he is bad, but is he all bad? Does he have no redeeming virtues? Surely, he must have some good in him as well. Look at the whole person.

A teacher once conducted an experiment. He held up a white plate and showed it to the class. In the center of the plate was a small black spot. He then asked the class to describe what they saw. One student said he saw a black spot. Another said it must be a target for shooting practice. A third suggested that the plate was dirty or damaged. Whereupon the teacher asked, "Doesn't anyone see a white plate?"

There may have been a small black spot, but essentially it was a white plate. Why do we only see the dirt? Let us learn to find the good in others. Nobody is perfect, not even ourselves. Let's not be so judgmental and critical. Let's try to see the good in others.

SLICE OF LIFE

Melodies of Faith from the Heart of Battle



Omri during his service in the Gaza Strip

In the midst of war, amidst the rubble and chaos of Gaza, a young musician found his voice. Omri Goren, a 28-year-old artist from Jerusalem, spent nearly six months fighting in Gaza. But even in the darkest moments, his faith and music never wavered.

Omri's journey as a musician began on the streets of Jerusalem. "I wanted to start from the bottom, to connect with people," he recalls. "I would stand somewhere in Mamilla with my guitar and just start singing. One person would stop, then another, and suddenly there were dozens of us singing and rejoicing together."

These street performances taught Omri an important lesson. "I observed people in their daily rush. Some were dressed impeccably. But they stopped, looked at me, and connected to the music. It moved me deeply."

Omri's path to music was paved by his father, Rabbi Ram Goren, a musician in his own right. "When I was eight, my

father realized how much I connected to music and sent me to learn the clarinet. He bought me one, and I would occasionally play at Chassidic gatherings. He connected me to music and niggunim (Chassidic melodies)."

But it was in the heart of conflict that Omri's music found its deepest resonance. During his time fighting in Gaza, he wrote and composed a song titled "Until Victory." The chorus rings out: "Until victory, we'll fall and rise, I'm with you / Until all the quiet is over / I'm not moving from here / You'll never feel alone / And my heart shall not fear / We'll land, we'll fly / We'll find another moment / In this madness / Our eyes shall yet see."

"The song was written for a friend who was breaking down," Omri explains. "I wanted to cheer him up – until victory, I'm with you! We wanted to convey a message that within all this great darkness, suddenly the great light will break through and we'll see the redemption."

The music video for "Until Victory" was filmed entirely using the bodycam attached to Omri, capturing the reality of the fighting. "This documentation from the inside gives a natural and tangible illustration to the words, and above all, conveys a message of victory over evil."

Another creation born from the war bears the title "Niggunim of Joy." Omri wrote the lyrics with Almog Tabaka and Maor Sapir. "It happened after a long stay in the assembly areas, before entering the Gaza Strip. All the soldiers wanted was to be encouraged and rejoice, and from there the wonderful melody grew, which the fighters hummed non-stop."

The power of music to touch hearts became clear to Omri in a poignant moment. "I performed at a prayer and memorial event for fallen fighter Yaakov Shlomo

Krasniansky. After the performance, his mother approached me and said that she had been to several memorial events for her son, but my singing really touched her heart. Since then, I've been going to the family's home every month for a Torah lesson with members of the undercover unit, and we sing together. In moments like these, I thank G-d for giving me the mission to bring joy to the people of Israel."

Despite the hardships of war, Omri found unity among the soldiers. "All the toxic talk about the draft law doesn't penetrate the fighters, because when there's a big mission in front of your eyes – to be together and fight for the people of Israel – no one has time for division. You can see a Haredi fighter on your left, someone who defines himself as an 'atheist' on your right, and everyone is fighting together. The most important thing for the fighters is the unity of the people."

As Omri reflects on his experiences, he realizes that his music has become more than just entertainment – it's a source of strength and unity in trying times. "To singing, there's so much power to touch hearts," he says. "In those moments when we sing together, whether it's on the streets of Jerusalem or in the rubble of Gaza, I feel we're part of something bigger. We're connecting to our faith, to each other, and to the hope for a better future."

Omri's journey from street performer to soldier-musician is a testament to the enduring power of faith and music. His songs, born from the crucible of conflict, continue to inspire and unite, reminding us all that even in the darkest times, there's always a melody of hope waiting to be sung.

Translated from Sichat Shavua

Jewish Culture Festivals Unite Communities Across the U.S.



Jewish culture festivals are vibrant celebrations of Jewish heritage offering immersion in a day filled with Jewish music, art and ethnic kosher cuisine. They are also opportunities for Jews to come together and engage in Torah, mitzvot and Jewish heritage.

In recent years, Chabad-Lubavitch centers around the country have begun sponsoring these annual summer festivals. This year, due to rekindled Jewish awareness and inspiration after Oct. 7, festival organizers are expecting even bigger crowds than normal.

This summer Chabad hosted its fourth Jewish culture festival in St. Charles County in Missouri where the community of 6,000 Jews is 40 minutes west of the larger Jewish community in nearby St. Louis.

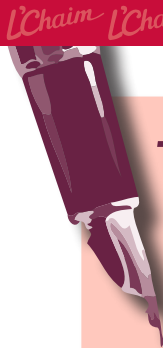
The year's festival embraced the spirit of togetherness. "It has been a difficult year for the Jewish nation, and people want to be together," said festival organizer Bassy Landa, who directs the Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County with her husband, Rabbi Chaim Landa.

Ethics of the Fathers: Chapter 1

He would also say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

Shammai would say: Make your Torah study a permanent fixture of your life. Say little and do much. And receive every man with a pleasant countenance.





The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

By the Grace of G-d
13th of Elul, 5727
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

Although it is a long time since I heard from you, I take the opportunity of the present significant and auspicious days of Elul to write to you a few lines, in the hope that you will read also between the lines.

The special significance of the month of Elul is explained by the Alter Rebbe who, in addition to being the founder of Chabad, possessed an all-embracing mind which, as is well known, already from his early youth embraced not only all parts of the Torah, but also the sciences of mathematics, etc. Family tradition transmitted from generation to generation, relates various episodes wherein his brilliant scientific mind came to the fore. I mention this by way of introduction, to his explanation that follows, because this gives the assurance that his words are valid not only on the basis of his extraordinary Torah knowledge, but also on the basis of a scientific mind.

This is what he said in regard to the month of Elul, which is the period of preparation for the new year:

There are times when a king leaves his palace and goes out to meet his subjects in the field, when everyone, regardless of his state and station, can approach the king, and the king receives everyone graciously and fulfills

their petitions. The days of Elul are such a period when the King of Kings is, as it were, "in the field."

Thus the month of Elul offers a wonderful opportunity to make up for the past months, and to do so not through trial and suffering, but with joy reflecting the graciousness of the King. All that is necessary is to resolve to go in the right direction, and then one will find the going much easier than expected.

May G-d grant that each one of us should do all that is necessary in the right direction, and to do so with a firm resolution coupled with true joy, and this will certainly bring a greater measure of happiness in the new year.

I hope and pray that I may receive happy tidings from you.

With the blessing of Kesivo vaChasimo Tovo,

P.S. To add a further point in an area which is familiar to you. As you know various scientific experiments have been made to produce artificial diamonds. This entailed the need for tremendous pressure and temperatures in order to transform a very simple and common element that can be found everywhere into a precious stone.

In the world of the spirit we find corresponding accomplishments, except that these can be achieved much easier, since it is not necessary to achieve it under tremendous temperatures and pressures. In other words, a Jew can easily transform his mental and spiritual capacities into "precious stones." All that is necessary is to have the firm resolution and desire, for in that case one no longer is limited to one's own resources, but becomes attached to the limitless Source of strength that one derives from the One Above.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

In his Iggeret Teiman (letter to the Jews of Yemen) Rabbi Moses Maimonides writes that "as a preparatory step for Moshiach's coming... prophecy will return to Israel." To prepare us to be able to receive the revelations of the Era of the Redemption,

we must experience through prophecy, a foretaste of the "advice" that will be communicated in that era. It is therefore important for later generations to know that it is "one of the fundamentals of our faith to know that G-d sends His prophecies through people." Always, in all generations, the revelation of prophecy is possible.

(From a talk of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'chaim Publication.

From the Archives

In this weeks Torah portion, Shoftim, we read, "You shall appoint judges and officers at all your gates." The Jews followed this commandment and, upon entering the Holy Land, appointed judges and officers. When Moshiach comes, we will return to this justice system, as the prophet Isaiah, prophet of the Redemption, prophesied. "And I will return your judges as in former times, and your advisers as at the beginning."

On a practical level, the injunction of "You shall appoint judges at all your gates," must be applied on several different levels. First, the "gates" can be interpreted as referring to the seven gates of a person: the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and mouth. They should act according to the dictates of the Torah. On this level, the "judges" refer to the intellectual capacity of the soul and the "advisers," the emotional attributes. Thus, every element of the life of a Jew has to be permeated and led by the G-dly power of his soul.

This concept does not have to apply to oneself alone, however. It should be extended and every man and woman should serve as a "judge" and an "adviser" in his family, ensuring that it runs according to the teachings and advice of the Torah.

To extend this concept even further, the whole world should follow the directives of the "judge" and the "adviser" of the generation, the "prophet I will set up for them, like you (Moses)," the leader of the generation.

And certainly, by allowing our G-dly soul to advise us, and by advising our families to follow the dictates of the Torah, and lastly, by following the advice of the Moses of our generation, we will merit the realization of the promise of Isaiah, that of a return to the glory and Divine favor of previous times, with the coming of Moshiach, NOW.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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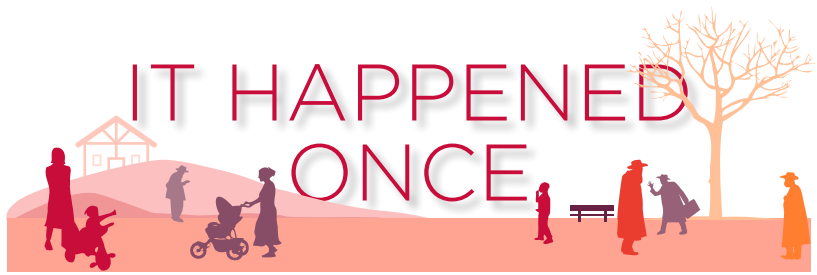
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IT HAPPENED ONCE

Rabbi Israel Salanter travelled a great deal, and whenever he passed a certain town, he stopped at the inn of a certain Reb Yitzchak, who was known to be a pious Jew. One day, being in that district, he went to Reb Yitzchak's inn.

Reb Israel sat down and ordered some food. Suddenly he noticed that there was a non-kosher salami on the counter. Reb Israel always tried to judge every person for the good, so he assumed that the innkeeper had purchased the meat by mistake or had been misled by an unscrupulous supplier.

He gently approached the innkeeper and said, "Reb Yitzchak, I want to make you aware that the salami on the counter isn't kosher."

Reb Israel was shocked when the innkeeper matter of factly replied, "Yes, I know, but I'm not so careful about the laws of kashrut these days."

Reb Israel was amazed. "What has happened to you? You've always been a G-d-fearing man."

The innkeeper went on to explain what had induced him to change his ways. A certain guest at the inn who was a non-believer convinced the unlearned innkeeper that there was no G-d.

"What did this person say to you to convince you of such a terrible falsehood?" Rabbi Israel asked.

"Well, the man took a piece of treif [non-kosher] meat in his hand and said, 'If there really is a G-d who cares what I eat, He will strike me dead when I eat this. But, you'll see that I can eat this salami and nothing will happen to me. That proves that there is no G-d.' And, Rabbi, with my own eyes I saw him eat the salami, and nothing happened! When I saw that he spoke the truth, I began eating treif meat, too, since I saw that what I eat makes no difference to G-d."

Rabbi Israel listened and thought for a while of how to approach this poor, ignorant man. As he sat deep in thought, the daughter of the innkeeper danced into the room waving a piece of paper high in the air.

"Father, Father, look. I was just awarded a certificate for my achievements as a pianist. I'm so happy!" The innkeeper beamed with pride, praising his daughter to everyone.

Reb Israel called the girl to his table and said to her: "I see that you have just received a prestigious certificate for your piano playing. I don't believe you're all that good. I would like you to prove it to me."

The girl was taken aback, and replied, "This certificate is proof of my expertise. I don't have to prove it to everyone who asks!" And she turned on her heels and angrily left the room.

Reb Israel called the innkeeper and said: "Your daughter is very rude. I simply asked her to play for me so I could judge for myself if she really is a competent pianist."

The father was embarrassed by the Rav's comment and he called his daughter back. She faced the rabbi and replied, "You're not being fair. I established my talent at school and I have the certificate to prove it. I certainly shouldn't be required to give a demonstration for anyone who asks."

"So, you see, my good man," the rabbi exclaimed. "Your daughter is clever. G-d could well answer you the same way. After He redeemed us from slavery, split the sea for us, performed countless miracles for us day in and day out, is it necessary for us to require that He prove Himself for every ignoramus like that

salami eater who was your guest?"

The words of Reb Israel Salanter convinced the innkeeper, and he repented of his error at once.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT
on the weekly Torah portion

Judges and officers shall you appoint for yourself in all your gates (Deut. 16:18)

"In each and every city," comments Rashi. The Talmud goes even further, explaining that "city" may also be understood to mean the individual person, who is called the "small city."

In order for a person's Good Inclination to be victorious and to rule, one must have the assistance of "judges and officers." The "judge" part of a person's spiritual make-up first looks into the Shulchan Aruch to see if a certain act is permissible or not according to the Torah. If the Evil Inclination afterwards rears its ugly head and balks at fulfilling G-d's command, the "officers" come to the rescue to force the individual into compliance. "Man's Good Inclination must always be in a state of anger against the Evil Inclination," states the Talmud.

(Lubavitcher Rebbe)

You shall set a king over yourself (Deut. 17:15)

If appointing a king over the Jewish People is a mitzva in the Torah, why then did Samuel the Prophet take the Jews to task when they demanded that he do so? The answer is that the Jews did not want an earthly king because G-d had so commanded; they clamored for a king out of a desire to imitate the nations around them. *(Ktav-Sofer)*

According to two witnesses...shall a case be established (Deut. 19:15)

The word which the Torah uses here for "case" is "davar," which alludes to the "dibbur" (speech) of prayer. The "two witnesses" likewise stand for our love and awe of the Almighty. The Torah teaches that our prayers must be uttered with this love and awe in order for them to be worthy and contain substance. *(Ohr-Hatorah)*

What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in battle and another man dedicate it (Deut. 20:5)

"And indeed, that would be grievous and sorrowful," comments Rashi.

Yet why should the fear that another person will dedicate one's house be even greater than the basic fear of losing one's life in battle? The inner meaning, according to Rashi, is that when the soldier goes out to wage war, instead of concentrating on his own personal relationship with G-d and doing teshuva, his mind is liable to dwell on his house and the possibility of never returning to it.



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